

**Council Open Business – minutes 1 to 10 inclusive.**

**1. Attendance and Apologies**

Present: John Graystone (in the Chair), Iwan Hywel, Daryl Leeworthy, Suzanne Samuel, Caroline Davies, Stephen Nicholls, Toni Schiavone (Vice Chair), Gareth Cork, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Chris Franks, Gayle Hudson, Dafydd Rhys, David Elis-Williams; Cathy Clark (through Skype link). The meeting was quorate.

In Attendance: Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services and Resources), Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum and Performance), Stephen Thomas (Company Secretary/Clerk); Siôn Aled Owen (simultaneous interpreter). Also Cecilia Forsythe (Curriculum Delivery Officer, South West and Mid Wales) and three learners - for minute 2 only.

Apologies: Julie Cook, Gerry Jenson, Sonia Reynolds (Vice Chair), Guy Wallace Smith, Nick Taylor.

**2. Learners' Presentation and Introductions**

Cecilia Forsythe introduced three female learners from the Welshpool area who had studied English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for up to 12 hours per week with us. Each said a little about themselves, their origins in Poland or Croatia, how learning English had assisted their lives and integration into Welsh/British society and other family members' abilities in English. While none of them had concrete plans for progression in educational terms, Cecilia Forsythe mentioned that tailored routes for advancement existed through us, including one equivalent student in the recent past who had moved on to study for an OU degree. All were thanked for their input and left the meeting.

Daryl Leeworthy then introduced himself, it being his first Council meeting since being elected to the South East Wales seat vacated following Heather Willbourn's resignation. Amongst other things he was the **Seren** (Ox-bridge entrance) tutor at Cardiff and Vale College. Those present introduced themselves in turn, including Cathy Clark through the video connection with her home.

**3. Minutes of the Open Business at the Council meeting of 29 January 2019 and matters arising**

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous Council meeting held at Coopers Yard in Cardiff were approved as a correct record. Four points therein were further discussed:

**Minute 2 – 2018 pay award settlement:** it was pleasing to announce that there had now been agreement with the trade unions on this and on the range of increments proposed according to job types and grades. The increased payments backdated to August 2018 would be made as part of the current month's salary pay. The Welsh Government would pay this settlement amount minus its first 1%, which was to be found from the organisation's own coffers. But there was no certainty that equivalent financial contributions would be forthcoming from it in future years.

**Minute 3 – Estyn Inspection of January 2019:** Mark Baines had met Penny Lewis (our chief inspector) once more of late and the intention was to have a further, formal meeting in late 2019/early 2020 to look at advances made in addressing the three recommendations that would appear in the final Estyn report. The confidentiality surrounding that report would only end on its appearance as a document on Estyn’s web-site, so it had not been possible to discuss it in detail at this term’s Regional Forums. The fact that there were only three recommendations was a positive sign, especially as they were fair ones and not overly-challenging, and AOC|ALW’s public response to them should be ready for the report’s publication date. A running theme throughout the report would be on proving the **impact** of our educational interventions on learners.

**Minute 4 – Coleg Harlech site update:** there had been a delay in completion of the sale because of checks undertaken by our solicitors Eversheds Sutherland, showing that the disabled access ramp and lift added externally to the theatre/auditorium building together with the disabled parking bay there had not been correctly filed with the Land Registry when built late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A Statement of Truth had been signed to attest to the fact that they appertained to the building’s ownership, but the buyer’s solicitor had also demanded retrospective registration plus indemnity insurance to cover the matter prior to contract exchange and the transfer of any monies. This however did not reflect any cooling towards the purchase on the part of Mr Leslie Banks Irvine: indeed he was a frequent visitor to the property and had already been provided with a set of keys to it by us – considered to be a reasonable move, for security purposes apart from anything else. There was some musing as to where fault lay concerning the Land Registry matter only appearing at such a late stage in proceedings. As a result, the sale-related public statement/press release had yet to be released.

**Minute 6 – Chief Executive’s Report, January 2019:** Chris Franks enquired how we were now dealing strategically with the fact that there was no dedicated Further Education Minister, and that such responsibility resided in Education Minister Kirsty Williams. It was reported that she had attended a WCVA event at which AOC|ALW led on discussing adult education and at which she had made positive comments, but had twice declined meeting us on a one-to-one basis in recent weeks to discuss adult education’s future direction. The Minister had however been at one of our branch History classes in Canolfan Soar, Merthyr Tydfil and in Darren Leeworthy’s view showed herself to be particularly interested in the links between changes to the Under 16 curriculum and adult education. She also seemed to be placing emphasis on the tag-line ‘Wales as a Second Chance Nation’ in terms of educational opportunities, at universities and elsewhere. **Given that Ken Skates now had responsibilities for workplace education there was a case for meeting him at some future juncture too.** The Chief Executive and Chair/Vice Chairs had by now met 15 Assembly Members, to some avail it was felt. Yet more than one Council member also mentioned a clear need to invest more resources in marketing ourselves and in raising our profile by all means at our disposal.

In relation to two further points in that same minute, it was explained that a reference to greater devolution of trade union education referred to the fact that Wales TUC Cymru was now using modules awarded through Agored Cymru instead of the England-based NOCN; and the fundraising post was still in the process of being recruited for, though the job title had changed to ‘Business Development Officer’.

#### **4. Proposed programme for the Annual Conference and AGM at Wrexham on 23 March 2019, including resolutions and amendments**

**The timetable proposed for the event later in the month was approved,** though a little more time for the lunch interval could assist harmony. On the 3 resolutions, there was a minor amendment to be made

to the wording of the first one (***educated democracy***). A question was raised over the mention specifically of male learners' needs in Resolution 3, to which Dafydd Rhys provided an explanation; and a request made that the proposer consider changing the verb *'instructs'* to *'calls on'* the Council therein. The Council found all three resolutions acceptable, as they did not offend the principles or objects of the organisation, and the collective view was that it was in favour of the sentiments expressed in all three motions and therefore did not need to put up some of its members to speak against any of them. **Stephen Thomas would contact Council members to inquire whether any wanted to speak in favour of the resolutions on the Council's behalf.**

## 5. Chief Executive's Report, March 2019

Kathryn Robson explained the significant drop in overall numbers in our learner totals that had occurred in two successive years as being a reflection of how the organisation was increasingly being funded, with more emphasis on longer courses and greater potential for assisting learners with their progression, without there being any corresponding dilution of our prevailing ethos.

Mark Baines then described the latest situation relating to funding for 2019-20 and beyond, following a meeting with a senior Welsh Government civil servant the previous week. We were to be offered transitional funding of £1 million/year for three years, at the end of which period that would become funding for which we would have to provide core educational delivery. There would also be a further £100,000 annually to extend our non-accredited liberal arts education as exemplified in our branches, the relevance of which had been better understood by the Welsh Government's representative. There had also been constructive discussions relating to the importance of the sparsity uplift in our model of provision – which needed to be viewed differently from that of FE colleges – and a request that we further justify it in writing, so that it might be partly reinstated within the transitional funding total.

Toni Schiavone proposed that up to 20% of the transitional funding be set towards working with Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (CCC) on courses through the medium of Welsh. Paragraphs 63 to 67 in the Report referred to current initiatives that were aimed at reacting to the acknowledged weaknesses in that domain, and Dafydd Rhys gave a synopsis of developments in his newly formed role pertinent to that and of a recent meeting with CCC on such matters. While David Elis-Williams was supportive of Toni Schiavone's wishes, without a definitive written commitment on the final allocation he felt it would be better to include the matter in the prioritisations and explanations being prepared for the Welsh Government by Mark Baines. **It was agreed that Michelle Kerswell should provide an update for each Council meeting on this, including progress in recruiting competent Welsh medium tutors, since it was such a crucial issue.** Caroline Davies thought that that priority could be turned on its head by training local people as the trainers, so as to expand the potential workforce in that field. The Chair, while accepting that expansion in courses through the medium of Welsh was a priority, felt it should be the Learner Experience Committee that decided precisely how that priority was implemented. Mark Baines was thanked for his advocacy work thus far.

Attention was drawn by Kathryn Robson to the good reputation that we had in the field of Youth, Community and Playwork: Rachel Burton, responsible for that field, was also leading on the mental health and well-being training that was soon coming up. It was anticipated that the recent improvements in terms and conditions for tutors and the continuing professional development being offered them in turn would lead to greater challenge to them in their future performance. In answer to a question on why the National Delivery figures were significantly lower in their delivery totals thus far than geographically regional ones, it was explained that its courses were not so structured according to

academic terms and that its overall total would catch up by the end of the year. **It was also considered useful, following the ‘so what?’ question posed consistently by Estyn, for the teaching and curriculum-related parts of the Chief Executive’s Report to seek to answer that theme consistently.**

## **6. Review of the February 2018 Senior Management Team (SMT) restructure**

Stephen Thomas spoke to the paper circulated on this issue, which set out the background to the decision in February 2018 to bring into being a Senior Management Team of three people and the undertaking to review that set-up on the basis of experience 12 months after its implementation. He reminded members of the main themes and arguments for and against the change a year earlier, described how the posts had evolved in terms of titles and responsibilities over the past year, and referred the Council to the written comments received from one Council member and from three members of the College Management Team. The minutes of the Search Committee’s meeting of September 2018 provided further background material, as did a corrected version of the present organisational structure, which was tabled.

The three SMT members then spoke. Kathryn Robson talked of the overly-operational nature of the SMT when she had first arrived in late 2016 and of the added coherence provided by the creation of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) more recently. Cath Hicks and Mark Baines both commented on the more efficient and timely decision-making that was now taking place and the effective middle management structure which had developed alongside the upper echelon changes. It was confirmed that no SMT member had more than 6 colleagues whom they directly line-managed. On the question of lack of teaching and learning experience at SMT level, much training had been undertaken to speed adaptation, the Curriculum and Welsh Provision Manager had proved central in underpinning this work (including supporting the response to the Estyn inspection) and frequently attended SMT meetings, and experience in those fields among the Council’s officers on the SLT had further proved useful. A Council member thought the Cardiff office - at least - was a happier place than it had been previously, and the trade union’s expressed view suggested that that was true for other office bases too. (The 3 SMT members left the meeting at this point.)

Council members were reassured by the answers received about the perceived gap in curriculum/education expertise and while there had been a risk of that being the perception of outsiders of the SMT restructure, there was no evidence to suggest that it had indeed come to pass. There was a consensus that there were no pressing problems at the senior management level and that morale overall had improved. Where there needed to be greater attention paid – and possibly more human resources applied – was in other realms. Marketing and communications were once again emphasised in that respect by more than one Council member (an example quoted was of a live Twitter account at the organisation that still mentioned the WEA): while the extended absence of a key member of staff was a contributory factor, the feeling was that greater strategic emphasis needed to be placed on those related fields. Another point was to do with safeguarding: it was unclear where responsibility for that brief rested in the organisational structure – which might mean merely a change to a job title/role, but given Estyn’s finding regarding the **Prevent** programme might also be a structural priority.

Discussion moved on to the associated position created a year earlier of Curriculum and Welsh Medium Provision Manager. It was important at this 12-month review stage to remind the incumbent, Michelle Kerswell, of the Welsh language competence level that was expected of her after two years in the post. It was felt that the positive intentions behind creating that role were coming to fruition, and it too needed to be reviewed formally in the near future.

On their return to the room, the SMT members were told of the main conclusions from the discussion in their absence. **The Council confirmed its support for continuation with the Senior Management Team structure as currently constituted, in form and size, for the foreseeable future; and asked that its comments on other strategic and (possibly) staffing-related matters be given due attention by the SMT.**

## 7. Management Accounts, August 2018 – January 2019

These covered the first six months of the 2018-19 financial year, and a formal review of the position had been undertaken internally based on them. Harlech site fees and restructuring costs not originally forecast were primarily responsible for a smaller than budgeted surplus at this stage. The capital funding of £293,000 referred to in the notes covered both IT and building/estates money being drawn down. Mark Baines said that there was no contingency fund, earmarked as such, included in the accounts in this or in previous financial years.

## 8. Minutes of the Learner Experience Committee meeting held on 8 February 2019

Caroline Davies (who was thanked for chairing this meeting, in the continuing absence of the Committee's Chair) stated that the meeting had been productive, with safeguarding given prominence in its discussions as it was at meetings of the Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity Group on which she sat. The Council noted the content of the minutes.

## 9. Feedback on the Council meeting

Cathy Clark commented that she had not been unduly hampered by the lack of simultaneous translation available for her of the Welsh medium inputs. Members were reminded that the July date would double as a strategic planning day to be held in one location only, as it had been in 2018.

## 10. Forthcoming Council meeting dates confirmed

- Friday 17 May: Ebbw Vale
- Thursday 18 July: Llandudno Junction – inc. additional Strategic Planning session

## ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 3	Minutes of the Open Business at the Council meeting of 29 January 2019 and matters arising	Given that Ken Skates now had responsibilities for workplace education there was a case for meeting him at some future juncture.	KR / John Graystone	May 2019

Minute 4	Proposed programme for the Annual Conference and AGM at Wrexham on 23 March 2019, including resolutions and amendments	The timetable proposed for the event later in the month was approved. Stephen Thomas would contact Council members to inquire whether any wanted to speak in favour of the resolutions on the Council's behalf.	ST	March 2019
Minute 5	Chief Executive's Report, March 2019	Michelle Kerswell should provide an update for each Council meeting on the expansion of provision through the medium of Welsh, including progress in recruiting competent Welsh medium tutors.  Following the 'so what?' question posed consistently by Estyn, the teaching and curriculum-related parts of the Chief Executive's Report should seek to answer that theme consistently.	KR / MK  KR / MK	May 2019  May 2019
Minute 6	Review of the February 2018 Senior Management Team (SMT) restructure	The Council confirmed its support for continuation with the Senior Management Team structure as currently constituted, in form and size, for the foreseeable future; and asked that its comments on other strategic and (possibly) staffing-related matters be given due attention by the SMT.	KR	May 2019